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# APPEAL JUDGES BACK 35-YEAR TERM FOR SPY

By ALAN COPPS

Geoffrey Prime, whose 14 years of spying for the Soviet Union caused incalculable harm to Nato security, would have merited the death sentence in wartime, an appeal judge said yesterday. So a 35-year jail sentence in peacetime was fully justified.

The court dismissed an application by Prime, who worked at the Government Communications Headquarters in Cheltenham, for leave to appeal against his sentence for spying, and against a three-year

sentence for the series of sexual assaults on young girls which led to his unmasking as a traitor.

Prime took "the Queen's shilling both as a member of the RAF and of Government intelligence service and then sold her, her subjects and allies to a potential enemy," said Lord Justice Lawton.

Mr GEORGE CARMAN, Q.C., for Prime, argued that his long term, passed last November by the Lord Chief Justice, Lord Lane, was "a sentence without hope."

It did not reflect the way in which Prime had co-operated with security services after his arrest, and it provided no incentive for other spies to come forward and confess.

But Lord Justice Lawton said that in such cases a balance had to be struck "In the end the scales have to come down on the side of deterrence.

"It is much better that spying should never start than that the spies should subsequently confess," he said.



Geoffrey Prime.



Mrs Rhona Prime, wife of the spy Geoffrey Prime, in London yesterday.

Prime, 44, of Pittville Crescent Lane, Cheltenham, began spying after making contact with the Russians while serving with the R A F in West Berlin in 1968.

He later became a linguist specialising in Russian with the Government Communications network and rose to be a section head at Cheltenham. He left in 1977 and then worked as a taxi driver.

In November he was jailed for 35 years, after pleading guilty to seven counts under the Official Secrets Act, and for three further years for indecently assaulting girls aged 11, 13 and 14.

As at the original hearing, part of yesterday's proceedings were held in camera when security matters were discussed.

Mrs Rhona Prime, who first told police of her husband's spying activities after he had confessed to her about espionage and to sexual assaults, wept at times while she sat through the hearing. Prime was not in court.

#### 'Hoist by own petard'

Mr Carman said many members of the public might say of Prime's sentence that it was "not a day too long," "richly deserved" or "lock the door and throw away the key."

But this view took no account of his full confession nor of the efforts he had made to co-operate with security authorities and minimise the damage he had caused.

Only, because that confession and co-operation had been so full had the prosecution been able to bring seven detailed charges against him, said Mr Carman.

"By his candour he provided material for seven counts and this grave sentence results from him being hoist with his own petard."

Since being sentenced Prime was said to have faced 13 interviews with security service officers and to have provided valuable information.

The sentence would carry Prime into his 83rd year. It was the longest determinate sentence passed on anyone for the last 20 years, said Mr Carman.

It did not reflect the need "to provide a positive incentive to any other traitor or to an innocent relation of such a traitor to come forward to confess and co-operate with the authorities."

#### Public abhorrence

Lord Justice Lawton, sitting with Mr Justice MICHAEL DAVIES and Sir ROGER ORMEROD, said the question of co-operation after sentence was one that would have to be considered by the parole board, not by the court.

He said Prime had accepted something like £8,000 from the Russians during his career of espionage. Even after he had left GCHQ they had found him valuable.

The Lord Chief Justice had been right to say that Prime's activities had caused incalculable damage to Britain and her friends and allies. "It follows that this was a very grave case indeed," said Lord Justice Lawton.

One factor which had to be taken into account in the sentence was retribution, not a fashionable word today. But the Lord Chief Justice had used the phrase "public abhorrence" in referring to Prime's activities.

"We are of the opinion he was right to do so," said Lord Justice Lawton.

With modern techniques of gathering electronic intelligence people in comparatively lowly positions had access to information of great importance.

"It is not only the Admiral Bvngs that have to be dealt with, it is also those who are well down the Government's employment scale," he said, referring to the 18th-century Admiral shot for cowardice.